



The New York Public Library  
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

**Erika Thimey papers**

1929-1994

(S) \*MGZMD 397

Compiled by Lea Jordan, 2014

## Summary

**Creator:** Thimey, Erika, 1910-2006

**Title:** Erika Thimey papers

**Date:** 1929-1994

**Size:** 3.93 linear feet (6 boxes, 3 volumes)

**Source:** Donated by Dianne Hunt and Miriam Cramer, 2010.

**Abstract:** Erika Thimey (1910-2006) was a modern dancer, choreographer, and founder of the Children's Dance Theatre touring group, which presented modern dance in a child-friendly format. The Erika Thimey papers hold correspondence, photographs, scrapbooks, programs, and Children's Dance Theatre tour files.

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**Processing note:** Compiled by Lea Jordan, 2014

## Creator History

Erika Thimey (1910-2006) was a modern dancer and choreographer. She was born and educated in Germany, where she received her diploma from the Mary Wigman School in Dresden. She was a dancer at the Dessau Civic Theatre and Opera prior to coming to the United States. She came to Chicago at the invitation of the director of the Northshore Conservatory to perform and teach for one

semester. She remained in Chicago to perform, teach, and direct motion choirs. She gave her first solo performance in 1932.

Thimey was a pioneer in the development of dance in worship services and gave her first church performance in 1932. From 1939 to 1947, Thimey and Jan Veen (Hans Wiener) were dance partners, performing and touring in many venues across the United States. During this time, she moved to Washington, D.C. at the invitation of Hanya Holm to become dance director of the King Smith Studio School.

In 1942, she founded the Dance Theatre Studios, a school of modern dance for children and adults. The school boasted two performance groups, one for adult audiences and one for child-centered modern dance presentations. The Children's Dance Theatre performance company toured the country in the 1950s and 1960s. Thimey created a large and diverse repertory of professional dance theater choreography for children's audiences. Her dances were performed in theaters, schools, libraries and outdoor venues in Washington, D.C., Maryland, Virginia, and throughout the United States.

Thimey also choreographed and directed motion choirs inspired by those of Mary Wigman. Her motion choirs were often large, public-space performances involving both professionals and amateurs moving together to create living sculpture. Her most famous choir was the 1936 site-specific motion choir at Chicago's Buckingham Fountain, which involved over 300 dancers. She continued her performing career until 1957 and worked as a choreographer until her retirement in 1980. Since 1993, her works have been preserved and recreated under the direction of the Erika Thimey Dance and Theater Company.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The Erika Thimey papers hold correspondence, photographs, scrapbooks, programs, and Children's Dance Theatre tour files. Correspondence is both personal and professional in nature. Frequently Thimey corresponded with other artists in the same field, such as children's puppeteers Bob and Nikki Tilroe and Helen Norfleet, who ran an arts camp for girls. Other notable correspondents include Hanya Holm, Ted Shawn, and Louis Horst.

Thimey's Children's Dance Theatre files document the booking and management of her successful touring group. These files consist of dancer bios and resumes, audition notices, contracts, programs and flyers, and correspondence. The correspondence is primarily copies of outgoing missives from Thimey to her staff.

Photographs consist of professional images of Thimey's solo, duet, and trio works; liturgical dances; and concert works for children and adults (including audience shots). There are also photographs of Thimey and Jan Veen on tour, both performing and backstage. Most of the photographs are identified by photographer as well as by subject.

Programs and flyers document Thimey's stage career and include her performances with Wigman's group, her tours with Jan Veen, and her time as a solo artist. There is also a program from Thimey's memorial service.

Scrapbooks consist of a 1936 volume about the Buckingham Fountain Festival movement choir, which holds clippings about the event as well as photographs of the motion choir at the fountain and costume shots of individuals who participated. There is also a scrapbook documenting Thimey's time in Chicago from 1931 to 1937, a scrapbook of student rehearsal snapshots from the Mary Wigman School (1928-

1930), and two scrapbooks of clippings depicting dancers and dance productions from the 1930s and 1940s.

With the scrapbooks is a hand-made and embellished book depicting a performance of the Pied Piper in 1942. The book is illustrated with photographs of children from Thimey's dance school.

The writings and research files hold Thimey's library list, photocopied research material on Mary Wigman, notes on Julie Lipeschkin's theories on children's pedagogy, and drafts of published and unpublished dance history articles. Other materials include Thimey's diploma from the Mary Wigman School, her Guggenheim fellowship applications, and a dance notebook (in German) dated 1929 which Thimey kept while at the Wigman School.

**Arrangement:** Alphabetical by file type.

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

Choreographers  
Dance -- Children's dances  
Dance -- Religious aspects  
Dance companies  
Dance for children

### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Scrapbooks

### **Names**

Wigman, Mary, 1886-1973

## Container List

- b. 1 f. 1-23 Children's Dance Theatre 1947-1975
- b. 2 f. 1-4 Children's Dance Theatre 1947-1975
  - Correspondence
- b. 2 f. 5-41 A-Ra 1953-2006
- b. 3 f. 1-15 Ro-W 1953-2006
  - b. 3 f. 16 Dance Notebook 1929
    - In German.
  - b. 6 f. 1 Diploma 1931
- b. 3 f. 17-24 Flyers and Programs 1931-1993
  - b. 6 f. 5 Flyers and Programs 1939-1947
    - Jan Veen and Erika Thimey.
- b. 3 f. 25-26 Guggenheim Fellowship Applications 1955-1959
  - Photographs
    - b. 6 f. 2 Camp Norfleet Students 1940s
    - b. 6 f. 3 *The Donkey Fable* 1950s
    - b. 4 f. 1 Liturgical Dance 1932-1975
      - Thimey, Erika
    - b. 4 f. 2 Jan Veen and Erika Thimey 1930s
  - b. 4 f. 3-4 Solos, Duets, and Trios 1930-1952
    - Touring Groups
      - b. 4 f. 5 Adult Groups 1950-1969
      - b. 4 f. 6 Children's Dance Theatre 1947-1969
      - b. 6 f. 4 Veen, Jan 1939-1947
    - Scrapbooks
      - v. 1 Buckingham Fountain Festival 1936
      - b. 6 f. 6 Chicago 1932-1937 (unbound)
        - v. 2 Mary Wigman School 1929
        - v. 3 *Pied Piper art book* 1950s
      - b. 6 f. 7-9 Various Artists 1930-1940 (unbound)
  - b. 4 f. 7-12 Writings and Research
  - b. 5 f. 1-15 Writings and Research